AMENDMENT TO THE CLAIMS

1-8.   Canceled.

9.   (Currently Amended) A method for a network element comprising:

maintaining for network layer switched routes, interface structures each storing a

set of network layer information;

distributing each of the interface structures to a set of one or more of a plurality of

routing protocol modules;

maintaining a routing information base responsive to the plurality of routing

protocol modules;

distributing forwarding information bases to each of a plurality of line cards;

maintaining for each label switched path (LSP) a forwarding data structure that is

separate from the interface structures and that does not include the set of

network layer information; and

distributing different ones of the forwarding data structures to different ones of

the plurality of line cards apart from distribution to the plurality of routing

protocol modules and the routing information base, wherein the

distribution of a particular forwarding data structure to a particular line

card is based on an ingress and an egress line card associated with the LSP

represented by the particular forwarding data structure.

10.   (Original) The method of claim 9 wherein the forwarding data structure includes a

first field to indicate a port, a second field to indicate a slot, and a third field to indicate a

flow.

11.   (Original) The method of claim 10 wherein the port is a virtual port and the slot is a virtual slot.

12.   (Original) The method of claim 9 further comprising maintaining for each forwarding structure, a data structure that indicates an egress slot and encapsulation information.

13.   (Original) The method of claim 12 wherein the data structure further indicates an egress port.

14.   (Original) The method of claim 12 further comprising distributing the egress slot and encapsulation information from different ones of the data structures to different ones of the line cards apart from distribution to the plurality of routing protocol modules and the routing information base.

15-17. Canceled.

18.   (Currently Amended) A network element comprising:
           a plurality of line cards;
           a control card having stored therein,
                   a plurality of interface structures having stored therein network layer
                          information;
                   a plurality of routing protocol modules coupled to one or more of the
                          plurality of interface structures;
                   a routing information base coupled to said plurality of routing protocol
                          modules;

a plurality of forwarding data structures separate from the interface data

structure, the plurality of forwarding data structures each having

stored therein information to determine forwarding of packets from

an ingress one of said plurality of line cards to an egress one of

said plurality of line cards, wherein a set of one or more of said

plurality of forwarding data structures include data indicating that

they represent a label switched path;

a label manager to distribute different ones of the forwarding data

structures to different ones of the plurality of line cards, wherein

the distribution of a particular forwarding data structure to a

particular line card is based on an ingress and an egress line card

associated with the label switched path represented by the

particular forwarding data structure.

a first of said plurality of line cards having stored therein,

a label forwarding information base generated from at least certain of said

plurality of forwarding data structures indicating that they

represent label switched paths; and

a network layer forwarding information base generated from said routing

information base.

19.   (Original) The network element of claim 18 wherein said information includes a
slot identifier, a port identifier, and a flow identifier.

20.   (Original) The network element of claim 19 wherein the slot identifier of each
forwarding structure indicates the same virtual slot and the port identifier for each
forwarding structure indicates the same virtual port.

21.   (Original) The network element of claim 18 wherein the control card further has stored therein a plurality of data structures, different ones of the plurality of data structures indicating different ones of said plurality of forwarding structures, egress slots, and encapsulation information.

22-55. Canceled.

56.   (Original) A machine-readable medium that provides instructions, which when executed by a set of one or more processors, cause said set of processors to perform operations comprising:

        maintaining in a control plane a first data structure that represents a label switched path (LSP), the first data structure indicating a virtual port, a virtual slot, and an identifier to distinguish LSPs of the virtual port and the virtual slot;

        maintaining in the control plane a second data structure indicating the first data structure, a slot, encapsulation information, and an index for the slot and the encapsulation information;

        distributing the first data structure, the index, and the egress to certain of a set of one or more label forwarding information bases (LFIBS) in a data plane, wherein the distribution is based on an ingress and an egress line card associated with the LSP;

        distributing the index and the encapsulation information to certain of a set of data structures within the data plane.

57.   (Original) The machine-readable medium of claim 56 wherein the second data structure further indicates a port.

58. (Original) The machine-readable medium of claim 56 wherein the encapsulation information includes an egress label.